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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 004206

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: HEALTH MINISTER BLAMES FOREIGN SOURCES FOR AUGUST 17 ATTACKS

Classified By: Acting Pol/Econ Counselor David Renz, reasons 1.4(d)

11. (C) Summary: During a meeting with the Health Minister, CDA discussed the August 17 attacks, the general and law and order situation, and the impact on Bangladesh's image. Hussein blamed outside sources (India) for the attacks. He said the reason for political violence is not religious, it's geo-political. End Summary.

12. (U) CDA Judith Chammas met August 22 with Health Minister Khondaker Musharraf Hussein. Econoff (note taker) accompanied the CDA for the one-hour meeting.

13. (C) The Health Minister told CDA that he does not believe that the accused fundamentalist groups are behind the August 17 attack. He thinks that these "minor fringe groups" could not carry out such a planned and coordinated attack and suggested a larger, more organized interest is responsible. He said India has geo-political interests in this country and therefore has genuine reasons to be involved in Bangladesh. He pointed to the issues surrounding the seven sisters and India's lack of control over this region as motives for India's involvement in such actions in Bangladesh. He said, "there is only a 17 kilometer strip of land that connects India to the seven sisters. Bangladesh is in the unfortunate position of being stuck in the middle."

13. (C) In response to CDA's observation that this incident clearly points to the presence of extremism in this country, the Minister said it is more likely that whoever is behind the attack wants to create the perception that there is extremism in this country. He said there is no need for Islamic extremism in this country. Extremism, and its associated violence, only occurs when a group feels isolated from the mainstream and is deprived economically or socially. He referred to the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) situation as an example of unrest caused by isolation and loss of resources. He said that the tribal violence in the CHT exists because the indigenous tribes were deprived of their farmland and livelihood when the Kaptai dam was built in the Pakistan era in the 1960s.

14. (C) In contrast, there is no such current or historical problem associated with the Muslims in Bangladesh, Hussein said. Almost the whole country is Muslim and the forces in power are Muslim. There is no reason for extremists to feel isolated or deprived and thus resort to violence. He alleged that some other larger force, namely India, is trying to further tarnish the image of the country and create instability.

15. (C) Speaking to concerns over the need for more effective investigations, he pointed to last year's August 21 attacks against the opposition leadership, saying the investigation has shown that the Awami League (AL) was behind the attack on its own people. He said members of the AL have admitted to involvement and even disclosed how they planned and executed it. He conceded that it is hard to understand why a party would want to attack itself and it would take further probing to get to the actual motives behind last year's attack.

16. (C) Minister Hussein admitted that the PM sees the August 17 incident as a "wake-up call", and the PM is determined to take the necessary actions to get to the bottom of these attacks. However, he said, there are forces within the government that do not cooperate with the PM. When pressed on whom these people were, he said that there are civil bureaucrats who do not see themselves as servants of the republic. They have political affiliations and take action based on party politics. AL backers in the civil service would not genuinely work to resolve persisting law and order issues and improve the country's image. The Minister also pointed to corruption and inefficiency at the lower levels of police and investigators as other reasons for lack of effective investigations into acts of political violence.

17. (C) Comment: Civil Aviation Minister Mir Nasiruddin also told us on August 23 that India is to blame for the attacks. It comes as no surprise that the BDG has immediately resorted to blaming foreign sources for the August 17 attacks. It is notable, however, that other parties have also started pointing fingers at India. On August 22, Jatiyo Party Secretary General told us that he and his party's Chairman,

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former Bangladesh President Ershad, also suspect India to be behind this attack. As a close PM confidant and a senior cabinet minister, Khondaker Hussein's admission that the PM considers this a "wake-up call" shows a shift in BDG's stance towards increasing political violence. Unlike in the past, BDG is showing political willingness to taking the situation seriously. However, his comments about obstructionist bureaucrats reveals BDG fears as to their ability to effectively investigate and solve this case. End Comment.  
CHAMMAS